

THE BATTALION

Chavez avoids opposition

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — After surviving a botched coup attempt, President Hugo Chavez won a precarious second chance Monday from Venezuela's business elite and upper classes that rose up to overthrow him last week. He also replaced members of the military high command that arrested him on Friday.



CHAVEZ

Opposition leaders expressed reservations about Chavez's willingness to bring about reform, despite fresh assurances from his government.

Chavez said he was "surprised" by the speed of Friday's coup and "anguished" by the violence. He pleaded with Venezuelans to work with him.

"I call upon Venezuelans, all Venezuelans, to reunite, to reflect. I want to hear from opposition leaders," Chavez said. He said talks with opposition figures would begin Tuesday and he envisioned Venezuela someday becoming a "middle-class country."

Chavez said that "a lot of Machiavellian people planned this operation. ... It was not just a military coup. The intellectual authors were not military personnel."

He refused to elaborate. But Chavez appeared to be addressing the interim president installed by the military, businessman Pedro Carmona, when he said: "What a grave error, man. You've gotten yourself into serious trouble."

Chavez said Carmona, who is detained with as many as 100 others, "probably" would be allowed to go home. Defense Minister Jose Vicente Rangel said Carmona's Cabinet members were freed.

The 1 million-strong Venezuelan Workers Confederation, which joined with Carmona's Fedecamaras business chamber to lead last week's general strike against Chavez, demanded that everyone be freed.

Bolivia's government said late Monday 10 people sought refuge in

their Caracas mission seeking diplomatic asylum after the weekend events.

Chavez said a "serious" opposition should organize into political parties so it can contest the next elections, in 2006.

"Chavez isn't only for the poor. I want to represent everyone," the president said. "We have sown hatred in this country."

Oil prices rose Monday after Chavez's reinstatement. Markets saw Chavez's return as a sign Venezuela would continue its policy of restricting production and thus keep oil prices high.

In Washington, the State Department said it was encouraged Monday by Chavez's appeals for national reflection and urged Venezuelans to end political polarization.

"I call upon Venezuelans, all Venezuelans, to reunite, to reflect"

— Hugo Chavez
President of Venezuela

The leftist Chavez had irritated Washington by cozying up to Cuba as well as Iraq, Iran and Libya.

Cesar Gaviria, secretary general of the Organization of American States, was headed to Caracas on Monday to begin an investigation.

Chavez was deposed and arrested early Friday by his military high command after gunmen opened fire on at least 150,000 people marching on the palace, demanding his resignation. At least 16 died of wounds that day, and hundreds were injured.

After Chavez's ouster, at least 49 died and 300 were wounded in the ensuing violence. Hundreds of businesses were looted.

He returned to power just two days later after other members of the military brass refused to go along with the revolt and tens of thousands of Venezuelans took to the streets

demanding his return.

Carmona's decision to dissolve all branches of government received immediate condemnation abroad and upset many Venezuelans, even those who had wanted Chavez out.

Chavez said he had sacked dissident members of his high command, including army commander Gen. Efraim Vasquez, replaced by Gen. Julio Gracie Montoya. Vasquez announced Friday that Chavez resigned but Chavez insists he never did.

Chavez also said he spoke with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Cuban President Fidel Castro and other world leaders. All were "stupefied" by events in Venezuela, he said.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan telephoned Chavez and "expressed satisfaction that the process of restoring constitutional order in Venezuela was under way," U.N. spokesman Fred Eckhard said Monday.

"He appealed for national reconciliation and underscored the importance of an inclusive democratic system in the country."

Chavez told Annan he was committed "to the principles of constitutional rule, legality and democracy," the U.N. spokesman said.

Chavez also said he was investigating why a plane with U.S. matriculation numbers was at an army airstrip on Venezuela's Orchila Island, one of five places he was held in captivity. He gave no details, but denied reports he had been mistreated.

El Universal newspaper, a staunch Chavez critic, ran a banner headline Monday: "Conciliation." On its front page, it emphasized Chavez's announcement that the state-owned oil monopoly's board of directors, appointed by Chavez but opposed by the group's executives, had resigned.

An internal power struggle at Petroleos de Venezuela erupted into a popular rebellion by the opposition last week, provoking the general strike and bloodshed. Chavez's intransigence and imposition by decree of economic laws widely opposed by business leaders had infuriated the upper classes.

Afghanistan fighting becoming more common

KHOJA KOTKAI, Afghanistan (AP) — They would have made an easy target: a steady stream of buses and trucks, minivans and taxis, spewing up a trail of dust as they trundled down the valley road.

Explosions and bursts of anti-aircraft fire rang through nearby hills, and two tanks fired shells toward a mountainside.

In most places, factional fighting on the road ahead would have been enough to make a driver pull over. But in war-ravaged Afghanistan, few seemed to mind.

Not the dozens of passing vehicles. Not the children herding goats. Not the bored-looking soldiers watching the battle between two rival commanders from the top of a red shipping container partially buried in the dirt.

"I don't think anything about it. I don't care," said 23-year-old Sherali, who was busy changing a flat tire. "This is Afghanistan. We're used to it."

Sherali spoke just minutes before a tank rumbled past his car, turned onto the valley floor, and began pounding an enemy position in the distance. Like many Afghans, he only uses one name.

It's unclear what sparked the weekend clashes between Gen. Zafar Uddin

and Ghulam Rohani Nangialai in the valley around Khoja Kotkai, about 30 miles west of Kabul.

Government officials called it an isolated turf battle between two longtime rivals and said it posed no threat to interim leader Hamid Karzai's fragile administration.

Karzai's government, which came to power in December soon after the fall of the Taliban, is faced with trying to secure peace in a country battered by 23 years of war.

But government authority is uncertain in hills like these just outside the capital. Much of the countryside remains under the control of local warlords, who sometimes take up arms against each other for patches of territory.

On Saturday in Khoja Kotkai, soldiers totting rocket-launchers at a crumbling roadside mud hut peaked around a corner to watch a duel between two trucks mounted with heavy guns — one from each faction.

One of the trucks fired from the top of a hill toward Uddin's men, then quickly disappeared from view. An artillery shell ripped into the dirt about 150 feet from one of Uddin's trucks, prompting a blast of return fire.

Drinking

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drinking such as alcohol poisoning and date rape."

Collins said drunk driving is a problem in most colleges, and can be better prevented through education.

"Drinking and driving is 100 percent preventable," Collins said. "I think that every college could benefit from a program like CARPOOL because no one should die due to drinking and driving accidents. It is hard to quantify the number of lives we save, but the roads are safer and some people would drive home if CARPOOL was not around."

New alcohol-related laws were put into effect this year to control the number of drunk driving incidents in

the Bryan-College Station area. These laws included raising the penalty for contributing alcohol to a minor to up to \$4,000 in fines and a year in jail. Also, if a minor is pulled over and has any alcohol in his system, he may be charged with a DUI and fined up to \$400.

Ford said she hopes the new laws make students aware of the risks associated with drinking and driving.

"People stop drinking for several reasons," she said, "whether it be religious or from a personal experience, such as a friend or a friend of a friend getting killed in an alcohol-related accident."

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